

To: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

From: EducationCounsel

Subject: Follow Up Research on Student Mobility – Part 1 (Citywide Transfer Policies and Systems)

Date: October 21, 2016

To help inform the discussions and deliberations of the Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force, this memorandum follows up on our June and July memoranda that examined existing research on the impact of student mobility on student outcomes and on broader district/school performance. Drawing again on available published research, this memo reviews:

- Student Transfer Policies and Systems in Los Angeles, New Orleans, and New York City

A second memo will follow on charters with boundaries or neighborhood preferences in Atlanta, Newark (DE), and Philadelphia.

Based on this review, we want to highlight the following takeaways:

- **Los Angeles** has a two-track transfer system. Inter-district transfers are handled through a centralized process of granting individual permits to students; this appears to have been developed as part of an effort to reduce transfers out of the LA Unified attendance zone. Intra-district transfers (including transfers to district, magnet, specialized, and affiliated charter schools) are not centralized and only require agreement between the two schools involved that adheres to district policy.
- **New Orleans** has established new policies that limit student transfers after October 2 to a handful of special circumstances (medical, safety, and childcare hardships). Though the specific impact of these policies on mobility has yet to be fully assessed, the process has added clarity to the number of students citywide requesting to move schools at different times in the year – and given administrators greater control over the process.
- **New York City** has a centralized process for transfers and offers families several Family Welcome Centers throughout the city that facilitate the registration and enrollment process and provide families with more information about their school options. Family Welcome Centers also assist the Office of Student Enrollment with gathering information for transfer requests based on hardship.

Please note that this review was not comprehensive and does not include all research that could be relevant to the Task Force's discussions. We aimed instead to provide a sampling of leading studies on mobility to provide a baseline of information. We may do additional research based on specific needs of the Task Force, if requested.

Student Transfer Policies and Systems

This section reviews transfer policies and systems in Los Angeles, New Orleans, and New York City.

Los Angeles

- **Context:**
 - In 2010, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) board [voted](#) to stop offering about 80 percent of its inter-district transfers (which was expected to affect nearly 10,000 students and bring in \$51M in new funds).
 - Today, Superintendent Michelle King aims to create a "[one-stop shop](#)" online that will consolidate varying enrollment policies to a single application with a single deadline. King envisions that applicants will also be able to use a new tool to search through choice options for them using the parent portal and "create a "shopping cart" for their top choices. It is not yet clear whether charters will participate in the program, though King has indicated that she is "open to it."
- **Transfer policies and systems:**
 - LAUSED currently has two types of transfer policies:
 - Inter-district transfers:
 - Require permits to be granted to both incoming and outgoing students by the centralized [Office of Permits and Student Transfers](#) (more info on the Office's policies [here](#))
 - Have a transfer permit application period for the following school year is Feb. 1 to April 30
 - Decisions may be [appealed](#) to the district that made the decision through a formal process.
 - Inter-district transfer permits are *not* required for students transferring to LA-based charter schools, though students have to go through the charter school's own enrollment process.
 - Intra-district permits
 - Require agreement from the two involved schools and may be granted for students who live within the LAUSD area to attend a school in the LAUSD other than their LAUSD school of residence, including LAUSD schools, affiliated charters, magnet schools.
 - Decisions by the schools can be [appealed](#) to LAUSD through a formal process.
 - Though the Office of Permits and Student Transfers does not review or participate in the decision, it has created a [policy](#) that governs when intra-district transfers may occur and under what circumstances, as well as school and parent responsibilities during the process.

New Orleans

- **Context:**
 - After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, all but the highest performing public schools were moved to the control of the state-run [Recovery School District \(RSD\)](#). The high-performing schools remained under the control of the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), while the schools under the control of the RSD were transitioned into charter schools. In May 2016, the Louisiana Senate [voted](#) to begin transitioning schools currently under the RSD back to the control of the OPSB.

- Louisiana has both mandatory intra-district and voluntary and mandatory inter-district transfer programs.¹ Some studies on student mobility have specifically looked at mobility in New Orleans.²
- Both RSD and OPSB use a computerized enrollment system called OneApp. Serving 89 percent of New Orleans public schools, the system is administered by EnrollNOLA and allows families to rank their preferred schools and be matched to a school that has availability and best [matches the students' preferences](#). EnrollNOLA also manages Mid-Year Enrollment and Late Enrollment.
- **Transfer polices and systems:**
 - New Orleans used to have a larger problem of students leaving schools after the first "count day" on October 1, which led to a new set of policies aimed at reducing midyear mobility rates and giving administrators greater clarity into and control over the process.
 - The primary enrollment window spans from November to the end of February of the preceding school year for schools using OneApp.
 - "Late Enrollment" spans from July to October 1 of a given school year. It is designed for families new to New Orleans, those who missed the application window, or those experiencing other circumstances that necessitate a placement change.
 - On October 1, schools may decide to backfill.
 - If fewer than five schools are willing to do so for a given grade, than all schools are required to open a seat in that grade, initiating a "round robin"-style matching process.
 - Participating schools make two major commitments in planning for their arriving students: (1) to backfill during the application rounds, accounting for student attrition and allowing the maximum number of applicants to go to a preferred school, and (2) to serve all students as they arrive throughout the school year.
 - Under the [Superintendents' Policy on Admissions, Transfers, and Re-admissions](#) (July 2013), students seeking to transfer schools after October 1 must qualify for a medical, safety, or childcare Hardship Transfer.
 - Medical Hardship can apply when a student has medical issues that can be addressed by a change in school. Supporting documentation signed by a doctor is required.
 - Safety Transfer can apply when a student's continued presence at a school may be unsafe for the student. The current school must provide supporting documentation.

¹ The Education Commission of the States outlines [Louisiana's policies](#) as of November 2015.

² Spiro Maroulis, Robert Santillano, Douglas N. Harris and Huriya Jabbar, [What Happened to Student Mobility After the New Orleans' Market-Based School Reforms](#) (2016) (looked at student mobility rates and patterns before and after the school reforms post-Katrina and found that overall mobility rates declined after the school reform for elementary/middle schools and decreased slightly for high schools; mobility rates decreased post-school reform; and that the greater the performance score difference between schools, the greater the number of students leaving the lower-performing school to attend the higher-performing school); Richard O. Welsh, Matthew Duque, Ph.D., Andrew McEachin, Ph.D., [School Choice, Student Mobility and School Quality: Evidence from post-Katrina New Orleans](#) (2014) (found that high-performing students tend to move to high-performing schools, that low-performing students tend to move to low-performing schools, but that the majority of students remained in the schools they initially chose even when given freedom to choose.)

- Childcare Hardships can apply when a family's childcare, transportation, or after-care situation has substantially changed since the beginning of the school year. The parent or guardian must provide supporting documentation. Homeless students are not required to demonstrate a travel hardship before transferring to a new school.
- Principal-to-Principal Transfer is also available, which allows for transfer if the principal of the "sending" school, the principal of the "receiving" school, and the parent/guardian are all in agreement with the transfer.
- Students seeking to transfer must go to a centralized enrollment center and apply for a particular transfer type. For a transfer to be granted, the transfer must ameliorate the hardship and must be the only solution to the hardship. Transfers are approved on a case-by-case basis, with stronger scrutiny applied closer to testing dates. One full-time employee reviews transfer applications. A manager oversees hardship transfers and the expulsion hearing office.
- Expulsions are reviewed in a central hearing office. Three alternative programs accept expelled students – expelled students may not select from any school with an open seat.
- New arrivals and transfers to New Orleans may select any school with an open seat on a first-come-first-serve basis.³
- **Impact:**
 - [EnrollNOLA Annual Report](#) (2016) analyzed enrollment data for the 2015-16 school year OneApp application process.
 - 92% of students who could return to their school for the following school year did not apply to transfer.
 - 77% of Hardship Transfer requests were received from October to January (ranging from 64 to 104 per month). (The report does not address how these numbers broke down by type of hardship transfer.)
 - Approximately 55% (~253 of 461) hardship requests were approved in the 2014-15 school year. (The report does not address how these numbers broke down by type of hardship transfer.)
 - New student arrivals remained steady over the course of the year, peaking around the new year.

New York City

- **Context:**
 - The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE)
- **Transfer policies and systems:**
 - NYCDOE [allows](#) current public school students whose assigned school presents a documented hardship (e.g., travel, safety, or medical hardship) to request a transfer.
 - The Office of Student Enrollment (OSE) helps facilitate some transfers. For example, if a student requests a "guidance transfer" because s/he is not progressing or achieving academically or socially at a school, OSE may reach out to the child's current principal for supporting documentation before making a decision. (All guidance transfers must be approved by the Superintendent.)

³ The final five bullet points are based on an informational interview between DME staff and NOLA officials.

- [Family Welcome Centers](#) handle all enrollment/registration issues and some transfer decisions. They also provide students and families with information about available school options.
 - Families are encouraged to use Family Welcome Centers to discuss the need for a hardship transfer. The appropriate Family Welcome Center also collects supporting documentation from the family and assigned school for hardship transfer requests. OSE may ask for additional information and approves or denies the student's request; if approved, OSE will offer the family a transfer option.